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Pope Benedict XVI's Blasphemy

ملخص:

لا زالت تلك الهوة السحيقة بين المسلمين والمسيحيين والتي سببتها الفوارق الثقافية والأخلاقية تضعها محل المقارنة والصراع حيث يرى المسلم المسيحي على أنه عدو قديم وهذا الأخير ينظر إليه كخطر يهدد العالم. وفي الفترة الأخيرة زاد توتر العلاقات بين الإسلام والغرب. فقد توالى الهجمات التي تستهدف الإسلام بصورة مستمرة أخرها الرسوم الكاريكاتورية المسيئة للرسول صلى الله عليه وسلم، وتصريحات البابا بنديكت السادس عشر وذلك الربط الضمني الذي أشار فيه إلى أن انتشار الإسلام قام بحد السيف وربطه بالجهاد أو الحرب المقدسة. لكن الشيء الملاحظ في هذه الإساءات أن بعضها متعمد والآخر عفوي وكلاهما يسبب ضررا كبيرا أما الأمر الذي لا يتسامح فيه المسلمون أن يكون صاحب هذه التصريحات على درجة كبيرة من المعرفة والوعي كالبابا بنديكت السادس عشر.

يجب على كل الديانات أن تدعوا إلى التسامح ونبتذ العنف لأن كلماتها محسوبة عليها ويمكن أن تؤدي إلى العنف.

وفي القرآن الكريم آيات عديدة تبين أن الإسلام لم ينتشر بحد السيف ولا بد أن المسيحية والأديان الأخرى تعرف ذلك.

Christianity and Islam continue to stand in stark contrast, divided by a cultural and moral chasm so immense that not many Christians have tried to budge it. From time immemorial, the Muslims have been viewed as the unbending enemies of the world and Western Christendom continues to view the Muslim as a threat. In a deeply prejudiced manner, commentator Samuel Huntington referred to the September 11th attacks as being a “clash of civilizations,”(22) in a book that bears the same title, as a conflict between Western values and Islamic culture, assuming that terrorism is a genuine expression of the fundamental values of Islam. He also argued that Islam is suffering a crisis of identity. It is worth noting that the cruelty of those assaults came as a shock not only to Muslims but to non-Muslim people as well. Following these events, caricatures of Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon Him) were published in September 2005 in a Danish newspaper, and were reproduced elsewhere, mainly in Europe. Once again a few months ago, Islam came under harsh criticism: Pope Benedict XVI, a man who embodies the vestiges of sacredness and other worldliness of the Catholic society, hit out at Islam and aroused the anger of the whole Islamic world. The Pope criticised the Islamic concept of "Jihad" or holy war, and purported that Islam was a religion of violence, slamming as it were, the identity of the Muslims. The depiction of Islam as a religion that preaches violence is nothing new in western discourse.

History shows that in earlier times, Christians and Muslims had been very frequently allied when either sought the aid of the other against a rival of his own faith. Common beliefs brought them together. From those contacts sprang friendship. A passage from Bernard the Wise has often been quoted: ‘*The Christians and [Muslims] have there such peace between them...*’¹ Islam and Medieval Christianity were indeed in Kipling’s words ‘sisters under their skin,’ complementary parts of a single civilization that extended from the Atlantic Ocean to the western borders of India.

However today, Islam is subject to diverse false interpretations. Western media and documents reflect violent and aggressive images of Islam, and Academic literature is no less tinged with such stereotypes. Indeed there is a well-publicized western assumption that Islamic religion and culture contradict the very precepts of peace-building and non-violence. Why has this feeling about the Muslims changed? Why has the old propaganda against Islam come to the surface? The main reason for this transformation, to my mind, is that most academic writing on Islam, not only by Orientalists and by Muslim scholars concentrates on a study of war,

(1) Mohamed, Abou- Nimer, ‘ A framework for non-violence and Peace-building in Islam,’ in *Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 15, No. 1/2. 2000- 2001,p. 60.

and violence. This had the result of perpetrating negative images and perceptions of Islam especially by the westerners.

Centuries of interaction have left a bitter legacy between the Islamic world and the Christian. This cultural antagonism is vividly displayed in the actual indifference of Christians toward Muslims. There seems to be no longer any hope of accommodating all religions. It also seems impossible to be optimistic about globalization, a much cherished modern term. Awareness of the Koran, the prophetic tradition, and the early Islamic period are therefore, a *sine qua non* for understanding and capturing the full meaning of Islam.

The most common belief among Christians was and is that Islam is a false religion and Mohamed (Peace be upon Him) not a genuine prophet and that '*Islam began by the sword, was maintained by the sword, and by the sword would be ended,*'² as the thirteenth century crusader, Oliver Paderborn put it. This view was echoed by Pope Benedict XVI, whose incendiary comments on Islam are dangerous, especially in our contemporary political and religious climate.

In a lecture given at the University of Regensburg, in Germany, which focused on the defence of the centrality of reason for faith and called for intercultural dialogue, the pontiff, a man supposedly engaged in making peace, cited a fourteenth-century Byzantine Christian Emperor, Manuel II Palaeologus, who insisted on spreading faith by reason and not by violence. The emperor is alleged to have said: "*Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.*"

This lecture gives us a revealing glimpse of the Pope's own prejudices. While Pope Benedict XVI urged more than two hundred and fifty pilgrims to stand up for their beliefs in the face of the "hatred and fanaticism" tarnishing religion, he himself did not shrink from tarnishing Islam, stressing its 'aggressive' side. Indeed, the Pope accused Prophet Mohamed (Peace be upon him) of spreading the faith through violence adding that: "*Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul.*" In this age of racial profiling and targeted killings directed at Muslims, this attitude of the Pope is dangerous. These comments from the highest cleric in Christianity caused a stir in the Muslim world and a lot of dismay. Many spokesmen sought to ease the severity of the Pope's

(2) Daniel, Norman, *Islam and the West: Making of an Image*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press., 1960)

rebukes of Islam. The Vatican even issued a statement to say the pope had never meant to offend Islam while the Muslims asked for an apology.

The Pope's hostility to Islam is well evidenced by reference to his opposition to Turkey's joining the European Union. In 2004, the Pope pointed out that Turkey should associate its future with Islamic nations, not with the E.U, which has Christian roots. This is a serious diversion from the rapprochement approach of his predecessor, Jean Paul II, who was a unique model of peace and tolerance among peoples. He encouraged dialogue between the Muslim world and the Roman Catholic Church, and had served his faith with utmost sincerity. At his death Muslim religious leaders praised Pope Jean Paul for his great contribution to his religion and humanity.

Pursuing an approach reminiscent of medieval times, Pope Benedict assumed that the Muslims represented the worst in life, reviving the old prejudices against Islam. We believe that this conception of the Muslim is the old slanderous one. In mind and in heart, the Pope still lives in Byzantium. He is contributing to the history of Byzantine polemics against Islam. He views Islam in the old way, through the prism of Roman pride doubting that Muslims could display the Roman virtues of piety and mercy. The Pope's ostensible tolerance and objectivity are rhetorical devices with specific moral and religious aims in sight. Fundamentally, he sees the Muslim as a barbarian, as a deceitful and fractious boor. His knowledge of Islam relates only to those verses, and this gives him a pretext to scorn Islam and add it to the list of Christian heresies. Is he not trying to renovate and restore the Empire? We have the impression that he is preaching to unlearned, to barbarian peoples who have the name of Muslims but the manners of pagans.

As a social and cultural group, the Roman intelligentsia still remains derisive and distrustful of their Muslim neighbours. Islam continues to be viewed as a particularly hateful and dangerous corruption of the true faith, a pernicious heresy, and its prophet Mohamed as the reprobate. Islam much as Roman Civilization had been contrasted with barbarism in the conventional manner, and the old judgment about the moral and cultural inferiority of the barbarian continues to be applied. Such examples of misunderstanding were mainly due to a faulty translation.

Since the Middle Ages, religious animosity provided the *casus belli* of crusade and jihad, and restricted cultural and intellectual contact between Christians and Muslims. In many medieval earlier sources, *barbarus* was opposed to *Christianus* and the religious character of their struggle was emphasized. The term '*barbaria*' came to signify both the realm of the Muslim Berbers of North Africa and the eastern lands inhabited by

ferocious barbarians. The barbarian then was the non-catholic Christian. To Pope Pius II, the Ottoman was the very symbol of the rampaging, rapacious barbarian whose ferocity in battle, and whose fanatic hatred of Christianity put the latter in jeopardy. Indeed the Ciceronian idea of savagery pervaded the medieval concept of barbarism. As Cicero truly put it, barbarians are '*sylvestres homines*' i.e., wild beasts. Like brutes, they gorge themselves on human flesh and quaff their bloody beverage from human skulls. This is the image of the Muslim today. In fact the appellation ascribed to the Muslims as "*cutters of God*" is but a reply to the Muslim accusation directed against Christians that they are "*those who admit partner to God*."

Although *Romanitas*, where pagan or Christian was just juxtaposed against barbarism in the Roman period, faded away in the sixth century, the old antithesis between Roman and barbarian seems to be perpetuated. Is it not a deterioration of human values, a disgrace of civilization and a triumph of barbarism? Is the Muslim the barbarian newcomer? Should the barbarians, (the Muslims), the 'wild brute' be pacified by adopting the Christian faith and distinguished from the peace-loving Roman by his so-called violence?

The first encounter of Islam with Orthodox Christianity was on the battlefield, in the conflicts that opposed the Arabs to the Greek emperors since the seventh century. Both civilizations were shaped by their religious ideologies. If the Koran appealed to a holy war against "*those who ascribe partners to God*" i.e., Christians in the Trinity, the Byzantines retaliated after the example of St John of Damascus a renowned theologian of the Greek Church who had a first-hand knowledge of the Arab Muslim civilization by considering Islam as a forerunner of Anti-Christ. And the Catholic Christian is distinguished from the Muslim just as the civilized was distinguished from the barbarian. The conventional moral attributes, its ferocity, treachery and brutality are retained.

Culturally arrogant and ethnocentric observations of non-European peoples and non-Christian cultures were given immortality in Western culture by the printed page. Indeed the printed book culture made it easy for the European to believe in an impending wave of manifest destiny for the Christian West. One of the earliest books printed by the Guttenberg press in 1454, was by Paulinus Chappe who depicted the Byzantine conflict against the Turks and the fall of Cyprus. Chappe's work laid down the foundations to a tradition of books portraying various aspects of Turkish culture together with their so-called atrocities against Christians. The atrocities which were alleged to have been committed were highly spiced to suit the spirit of the time. Accounts of atrocities were used to inflame the minds of the Christians and incite them to take the Cross

against the infidels. For the purpose of propaganda, much was also made of the so-called idolatry of Muslims. The belief that Mohamed was worshipped as a god became widespread and was fostered by accounts written by some participants. The song of Roland for instance, says: '*The Muslim loves not God, serve Mahound and worships Apollon.*'

A representative German reaction to Turkish atrocities came from John Brenz, a Lutheran reformer, who wrote that a civilized man should '*...not violate natural law which is Divine law*' (16th c Travel Books, 60) Luther before him depicted Islam as a flawed religion based on the Coran, a book of violence since it encouraged governments to take the sword. Luther concluded that the Turk is '*nothing but a murderer or highwayman.*'³ This stereotype of the Turk, hence of the Muslim, became enshrined in books and remained ever since, widening the gap between Christians and Muslims.

With similar effect, the humanist, John Adolph Muelich, wrote in 1543 that '*The Turks is a great barbarian with no sense of justice,*' recalling medieval crusaders and denouncing Mohamed as a fake prophet. Such cultural biases propagated thanks to the printed word.

It is our argument that this highly personal attack on Mohamed feeds off societal prejudice toward the Orient. Other westerners also drew on dubious data to bolster their case against Mohamed, and made cutting remarks about Islam's incompatibility with reason. Drawing on a well known topos of Oriental discourse, they went on portraying Mohamed in such a way as to reinforce what they saw as the absurdity of Islam. The Encyclopaedists' views of early Islamic history are fraught with elements of guile associated with religion. To Diderot, the French writer, Islamic law comprises the Holy Koran, the Sunna of the Prophet, the consent of the community and reason. Thus according to him, reason was the last area to which believers resorted for guidance. In *Sarrasins ou Arabes*, Diderot expands on how Mohamed '*the fanatical enemy of reason*' dictated his will on the ignorant masses: "*Mohamed added his sublime dreams to some scraps torn from the Books of Jews and Christians and cut the throats of those who hesitated to regard those chapters as inspired work.*"⁴ Diderot also sets forth that Mohamed's illiteracy correlated directly to his early disciples' intense hatred of all forms of knowledge. (201)

(3) Martin, Luther, *On War Against the Turks*, (1529). Quoted in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, Vol. 32, no 2, 2000; 95.

(4).Ibid., p. 60

(5) Quoted in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 201.

(6) Ibid., 204.

In the same vein, the Chevalier de Jaucourt, (1704- 80) a leading philosopher and Encyclopaedist, contended that Mohamed with sceptre in one hand and sword in the other, extended the choice of those he conquered of either embracing his “sect” or paying tribute. (IJMES, 203) De Jaucourt goes on trying to demonstrate that like Mohamed, his immediate successors, committed to the rapid spread of Islamic civilization, preyed on the weak:

“...conquering apostles, like their chief, and animated by ambitious zealousness for their new doctrine, emboldened by the fatigues of war... they drove under the banner of their prophet enthusiastic troops, avid for carnage and booty...” François Henri Turpin, (1709- 99) a prolific writer on Islam and the East also stressed the lack of reason in Islam, and explained in the *Encyclopaedia* that because of his fanaticism, Mohamed succeeded in convincing Meccans to join the Muslim community.

Thanks to early Muslim scholars, who have scrupulously recorded the Prophet’s life, his companions and Islam’s early history, it is not difficult to respond to such fallacies and deliberate perversions. In response to the western presentation of an irrational Islam founded by an impostor and a fanatic (Mohamed), and based on a book of lies. (Koran) While it is true

that Islamist extremism is implicated in potent and terrifying forms of violence in our modern world, but bombing, hijacking and the massacre of innocent civilians are not endorsed by the Koran, but rather violate Islam’s most sacred principles. Islam’s true values are peace, reconciliation and forgiveness and this is incompatible with violence. Peace-making and discussion in conflicting situations, are the fundamental principles of Islam as is clearly expressed in this Koranic verse: “ *If they incline to Peace, you should incline to it and trust God.* ” (8: 39) The story of Habil (Abel) and Kabil (Cain) reflects Islam’s non-violence philosophy. Abel stands for justice and righteousness and refuses to resort to violence even in a confrontational context, whereas Cain kills on any pretext:

“ God accepts the sacrifice only from those who are righteous... If you will lift your hand to slay me, I shall not lift mine to slay you. I am afraid of God’s displeasure, who is the Creator of all worlds. ” (5:27-28)

Because the Koran had been revealed in the context of an all-out war, several passages deal with the conduct of armed struggle. This has led some westerners to interpret Islam as a religion of wars. Conflict is a natural human phenomenon and it will remain part and parcel of the human reality because man is a fighting animal. And wars are as much part of the history of Islam as they are part of the history of other religions. However undesirable and destructive they are, wars may be in some cases inevitable and quite legitimate.

In the Koran, warfare is always evil, though limited force and struggle is permitted under certain conditions. Fighting in Islam is a battle for survival and the only permissible war is one of self-defence. Muslims may not begin hostilities (2: 190), though sometimes they have to fight in order to avoid the kind of persecution that Mecca inflicted on the Muslims. In support of this strong argument, these two verses are quite enlightening: “*Permission to fight is granted to those upon whom war is made, because they are oppressed.*” (22:39) In the same sense, God says: “*Fight in the way of God with those who fight with you and do not exceed the limits.*” (2: 190) He also added: “*Nor slay such life as Allah has made sacred, except for just cause, nor commit fornication; and any that does this(not only) meets punishment, (but) the penalty on the Day of Judgement will be doubled to him.*”(25: 68-69) Fighting is also allowed when values are threatened (4: 75; 22: 40). Viewed from this angle, for a Muslim then, to be denied the right to worship, constitutes a violation of human rights and becomes a valid reason for using force. Prophet Mohamed (Peace Be Upon Him) and his companions took part in battles and wars. In such circumstances, Islam makes it clear that the humanity of the adversary has to be respected, that non-combatants, women, children, the aged must not be harmed and that public buildings, dwellings, crops and water sources must be preserved. These Islamic precepts provide a strong base for a solid peace-building and conflict resolution approach within Islam.

Thus as Karen Armstrong, a British renowned prolific writer on all three monotheistic religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam, and the author of *Islam, a Short History* put it, Islam cannot be equated with terrorism. She stressed that Islam is not a religion of violence. She added that terror has no religion, and that crimes are committed in the name of all religions. Then why not call the I.R.A. bombings “Catholic terrorism”? She rightly observed.

Islam, a religion of life, also calls for purity, and it does not contradict with one’s own nature. Etymologically, the word Islam comes from *istislam*, which means ‘surrender,’ that is, surrender to God’s precepts. The word is also derived from the word *salam*, or ‘peace,’ for if we follow God’s laws, we will achieve peace in its broadest sense - peace of soul, peace between individuals as well as peace between nations. Moreover, Prophet Mohamed (Peace be upon him) directs us towards love of others, towards charity. In one of his *hadiths*, the Prophet calls on the Muslims to perform charity and to be good and kind to the poor and to everyone. The Prophet said, the Muslim “*should then abstain from evil, for verily that is charity on his behalf.*” We should also praise Muslim practice of almsgiving. (Zakat) The Koran is sprinkled with passages extolling the

importance of giving alms to the needy. Actually, all religions regard the giving of charity not merely as an act of generosity but as an act of righteousness for all the wealth of the world is God's and it is there to be shared among His children.

Islam propounds the idea of the entire human race as being one family of God. The tenets of Islam are those written down in The Declaration of Human Rights: all men are equal, without any distinction of colour, language, race or nationality. Islam indeed transcends all those false impediments of race, ethnicity, status and wealth. In the contemporary world, this Islamic virtue should be propagated. To a world torn by rivalry and wars, Islam presents a message of life and hope, and of a heavenly future.

Moreover, as is borne out by one of God's commandments in the Koran, Muslims must believe in all prophets. In other words, Islam teaches the respect of all beliefs. This implies that we are not allowed to show any disrespect to any prophet or to the religion he taught to his followers. Islam also makes it clear that religious belief must come out of a person's free choice, as God has also commanded not to use any kind of coercion in the matter of religion.

[Let there be no compulsion in religion, truth stands out clear from error.] (Al-Baqarah 2:256)

This was a principle evident in the life and practice of Prophet Mohamed (Peace be upon Him) as well as in the Constitution of Medina 7, a document which guaranteed the freedom of worship to all religious communities. Jewish, Arab tribes, and people from various racial national origins including Romans, Persians and Ethiopians. It was in the year 622 CE that the Prophet came to Medina, after a thirteen-year period of preaching Islam to the Koraich tribe in Mecca. Taking into account the hopes and aspirations of this pluralistic community, Prophet Mohamed drew up the basic tenets of a pluralistic constitution, which not only established the rights and equality of every citizen before the law, freedom of religion, trade and speech but it also spelled out the political rights and duties of both the Jews and Muslims to protect each other from every encroachment to their security and promote moral conduct and fair dealing. This spirit of tolerance and understanding is at the heart of the Koran. Allah says, in the Holy Book, that He has made people into nations and tribes so that they can know and deal with each other in an equal temper of kindness and generosity:

[O human kind! We created you from a single pair of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know and deal

with each other in kindness (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God (is he who is) the most righteous of you, and God is Knower, Aware.] (Al-Hujurat 49:13)

The above verse highlights the point that in Islam there is no place for intolerance, prejudice, or discrimination based upon colour, race, nationality or any other consideration.

7. The Constitution of Medina was a historical document authored and dictated by Prophet Muhammad as the law of a land inhabited by different ethnic groups and nationalities. The document secured and promoted cooperation and fraternity among all people of any creed, color, ethnicity, and lineage, and set down the criterion of righteousness as the base of distinction.

Moreover, Islam targeted neither the Jews nor Judaism. The Muslim's acceptance of the Jews and Christians (referred to in the Koran as People of the Book) as authentic religious communities is made clear in this verse:

[And dispute not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong and injury.] (Al-'Ankabut 29:46).

This verse makes it clear that Muslims should avoid dispute, anger or other negative feelings and try to reconcile with others. Moreover, historical records reveal that when the Jews were being persecuted in Europe during the Middle Ages, they found peace, harmony, and acceptance among the Muslim people of Spain. Actually, this period was referred to by the Jews themselves as the golden age.

Marmaduke Pickthall, whose translation of the meanings of the Koran remains one of the most popular today, also commented on the subject: In Spain under the Umayyads and in Baghdad under the Abbasid Khalifas, Christians and Jews, together with Muslims, were admitted to the Schools and universities – not only that, but were boarded and lodged in hostels at the cost of the state. When the Moors were driven out of Spain, the Christian conquerors held a terrific persecution of the Jews. The Muslim empire then became an asylum for all those who fled from persecution by the Inquisition. It is also well-known that during the Crusades, Salah Eddine El Ayubi, a physician- called for a truce and aided the wounded Richard the-lion-hearted – his Christian foe.

In addition the Koran never claimed to teach a new religion. It consistently contextualized the Prophet Mohamed as being the last

messenger in a long line of messengers from Allah confirming the truth of all earlier scriptures, and that His mission was to restore the pure religion of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus. This continuity is clear in the respect the Prophet showed to people of other religions .Mohamed (Peace be upon Him) had not come to deny the Old and New testaments but rather to fulfill their spirit. The Koran like other Scriptures, is the fountainhead of all knowledge dealing with human life. The Islamic view of earlier religions is to be found in the verse that follows:

[The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah - which We have sent by inspiration to thee (O Mohamed) and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus... Call (them to the Faith), and stand steadfast as thou art commanded, follow not thou their vain desires; but say: "I believe in whatever Book Allah has sent down; and I am commanded to judge justly between you. Allah is our Lord and your Lord: for us (is the responsibility for) our deeds, and for you for your deeds. There is no contention between us and you. Allah will bring us together, and to Him is (our) final goal.] (Ash-Shura 42:13 & 15)

It is alleged that Christianity is the religion of love and peace, of humility, yet to claim that Christians abstained from violence is very far from the truth, as the evidence shows. Christians have a much darker past of murder and persecutions against those who do not conform to their doctrines when compared to Muslims.

Many of the Christians who took part in the Crusades spoke of their great pride in wading in the blood of their enemies. This is evident in Daimbert's comments in the Official Summary of the first Crusade, when he said: "*And, if you desire to know what was done about the enemy whom we found there, know that in the portico of Solomon and his Temple, our men rode in the blood of the Saracens up to the knees of the horses.*"⁸

When Jerusalem was conquered on the fifteenth of July 1099 by the Crusaders who were also known as the Christian Knights, more than sixty thousands dwellers, Jewish and Muslims, were slaughtered in cold blood. The Archbishop of Tyre, an eye-witness, wrote that: "*It was impossible to look upon the vast numbers of the slain without horror; everywhere lay fragments of human bodies, and the very ground was covered with the blood of the slain. It was not alone the spectacle of headless bodies and mutilated limbs strewn in all directions that roused the horror of all who looked upon them. Still more dreadful was it to gaze upon the victors themselves,*

(8)August, C. Krey, *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eye Witnesses and Participants*, (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1958) p.275

dripping with blood from head to foot, an ominous sight which brought terror to all who met them. It is reported that within the Temple enclosure alone about ten thousand infidels perished.”⁹

Moreover, if Islam is viewed as a religion of violence, what would the Christians say about the atrocities committed during the Renaissance wars of religion involving Protestants and Catholics? Didn't the American settlers conquer the New World with the Bible in one hand and the sword in the other? What about the horrors inflicted on the Irish people by their Christian neighbours? Strangely enough, it is Christianity that has been embraced by the most warlike of modern nations, the nations of Europe. It is also Christianity that had been used by the nineteenth century imperialist and colonialist as a justification for the invasion of alien territories. To the imperialist, Christianity was a civilizing force, therefore he forced it upon those so-called barbarians. The much praised Euro-Christian enterprise in the non-European world, far from being a credit to the colonized had been devastating to tribal peoples.

One may object that we are concentrating only on the negative, not providing any background analysis, or not making distinctions between various denominations of Christianity and between secular and religious tendencies in the Christian world. But this is precisely what the Christians do to Muslims. It is unfortunate that Islam is continuously being purported to be a religion of violence by the Christians.

Whatever has been said against our Prophet throughout these centuries is unbearable. It is our contention that the problem is not in Islam itself but in people's misunderstanding.

Despite their differences, Islam and Christianity were of one piece in their origins and development. They proceed from the same world-view. The idea of re-asserting Christian values, culture and identity in highly secular Europe is quite tough and one can only view it with great pessimism. If Europe had known as much of Islam, as Muslims knew of Christendom, in those days, those violent outbreaks known as the Crusades would not have taken place, for they were based on a complete misapprehension.

Muslims have been living among non-Muslims since the beginning of the Revelation, and it did not seem to bother them. But today many Muslims, even those who grew up in a multi-cultural society, have problems dealing with 'others.' Rather than reopening medieval animosities, one might hope that the world will offer us, in the future, a more hopeful vision

(9) Ibid., p. 275.

of the possibilities for dialogue, understanding and mutual respect. We express the hope that all nations might be reconciled under one moral unity, a common allegiance, ie. a community united under one banner: humanity. The successful attainment of this goal is assured by virtue of the fact that it coincides with God's plan for the salvation of all men in the great City of God. Moreover, we must hold to the doctrine that there is only one God, who is omnipresent, but always the same unique, almighty God. God's sovereignty is exalted and revered in other religions, too. When one of the scribes asked Jesus what was the first commandment, Jesus replied, just as Mohamed would reply : “ *The first commandment is: Hear, O, Israel, the Lord Our God is one Lord.*”

The problem is also in people's misunderstanding of the Bible and of Christianity. The Commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ does not offer any opting-out clauses. The fact that the Israelites are later encouraged to slaughter thousands as they take possession of the Promised Land (as with Joshua's genocide at Jericho) does not sit well with the instructions brought down from Mount Sinai by Moses. Moreover, Jesus reduces the Commandments to two: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy might and with all strength and with all thy soul;’ and ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.’ These are the basic requirements then, of a Christian, and it seems clear that they do not permit the making of war, the misrepresentation of the ‘neighbour’ or of his beliefs. They do not permit Crusades or political action prejudicial to the neighbour as exemplified in the Pope's attitude towards Turkey. The supposed Christian who engages in violence of all kinds, including verbal and attitudinal, is, then, violating the basic commands of Jesus and is thereby disqualifying himself from deserving the very description ‘Christian.’

It is high time that Christian people changed their attitude towards ‘the others’ and tried to see Muslims as fellow citizens and humans. This will certainly lead to better understanding from both sides and to cohabitation. This is the true meaning of globalisation. Globalization contributes to establishing harmony and removes not only cultural barriers but many of the negative dimensions of culture. In other words, globalization is a vital step toward both a more stable world and better lives for the people in it. Otherness is threatening international co-operation, and extremism is becoming nowadays an expedient for democratic values. International relationship between countries, between religions, is in the final analysis, a matter of getting on well with others. The events happening in different parts of the globe nowadays have seriously impaired the notion of a multi-cultural or multi-religious society. Extremist political, social, ethnic and

religious behaviour constitutes a danger to the viability of such a society, hence to democracy and social progress.

Moreover, the acceptance of otherness cannot be a mere humanitarian issue but a *sine qua non* for stability, security and peace in the world. Hence, breaking down barriers is the first step. In addition, religious traditions could play an important role in promoting peace and non-violent forms of conflicts resolution. More importantly, political as well as religious leadership, or should we say exclusivists, those who only see one mode of religious thought- their own- as true and the others as false, should avoid caricaturing other traditions and eschewing exaggerated attributions of malevolent qualities to them.

Finally, as a reminder of the toll that such conflicts take, one needs only look at the twentieth century's genocides. In each one, culture is used to provoke conflicts and to justify deeds among their people. All victims were the victims of 'culture' be it ethnic, religious, ideological, tribal, or nationalistic in its origins. History records reveal many examples of the so-called 'superior' cultures eradicating 'inferior' opponents. Superiority is not in one's origins, but in one's conduct. Certainly, it is naive to expect broad success in avoiding future conflicts among cultures. But at least we must try to reduce the disparities that will fuel some of those conflicts. If cultural diversity is to be preserved then Muslims and non-Muslims have to adopt a non-violent approach to address their differences and conduct their lives. Hence, respect for the individual's identity, acceptance of his difference, are the cornerstone of cultural identity. Differences imply a commitment of different groups, to different styles of life, and to different value frameworks. This is the truth found in Islam, a truth that pertains not only to Muslims but to all men, to all nations, and to all creeds.

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